



The Orthodox Church

Kallistos Ware

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Since its first publication thirty years ago, Timothy Ware's book has become established throughout the English-speaking world as the standard introduction to the Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy continues to be a subject of enormous interest among Western Christians and the author believes that an understanding of its standpoint is necessary before the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches can be reunited. In this newly revised and updated edition he explains the Orthodox views on widely ranging matters as Ecumenical Councils, Sacraments, Free Will, Purgatory, the Papacy and the relationship between the different Orthodox churches.

In Part One he describes the history of the Eastern Church over the last two thousand years with particular reference to its problems in twentieth-century Russia: and in Part Two he explains the beliefs and worship of the Orthodox Church today. Finally, he considers the possibilities of reunion between the East and the West. In this latest edition, he takes full account of the totally new situation confronting Eastern Christians since the collapse of Communism.

The Orthodox Church Details

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From Reader Review The Orthodox Church for online ebook

Chad says

About half history and half theology, this classic by Ware is a must-read for anyone interested in the Orthodox Church. While I will always take issue with some of the teachings and practices of the Orthodox, I say with profound gratitude that I have also learned much from them over the past 20 years.

Pat Ramsey says

This is one of the most honest history books I've ever read. Ware sugarcoats neither East nor West in his depiction of the historical church. He disarmed much skepticism by giving the good, the bad and the ugly.

David says

Exactly what I hoped it would be--a thorough introduction to the history and worship of the Eastern Church. Ware's book is eminently readable and engaging, even humorous at times (in a very dry, understated way). Perhaps the best feature, though, is the list of "further reading" near the book's end.

(What a difference 10 years made for me. I first tried reading this fairly dense (yet not overly dry) book in my mid-twenties, when I first began exploring Orthodoxy. I think I read bits of two chapters at most...)

Emin Kiraz says

A very concise book for understandig history and structure of the Eastern Orthodox Church as well as its relations with the rest of the Christendom. It is well-structured and easily readable...

Comaskeyk001 says

So I'm at work talking to a friend who is gay and we comment on the split in the Episcopal church over a gay priest. The conversation turns to the Great Schism between Orthodox and Roman Catholic and neither of us have a clue what caused it, or exactly when it took place.

One of my GR friends is an Orthodox priest so I asked him to suggest some books to read. Top on his list is this one by T Ware.

Good both on the history of the Eastern Church and the Doctrine of same. The author is a converted member and holds the position or did when the book was published with the title Bishop. so he turns the other cheek when talking about the horrible acts committed by Crusaders on Eastern faithful and vice versa..But he is

honest and this book was very helpful in developing in me a broader view of religious/spiritual pursuits.

Jacob Aitken says

Bishop Ware gives the layman a thorough introduction to the Orthodox Church. He covers the basics of the faith and is sensitive to many outsider objections. He is not neutral and writes with a clear bent towards Orthodoxy, which is understandable and to be expected. The book has two parts: a historical introduction to the Orthodox faith and a systematic exposition of the major themes of Orthodoxy.

Historical Introduction.

Ware traces the rise of the Orthodox faith from the New Testament through the Councils and ends with the Orthodox Church in dispersion (largely due to Communism). He notes the Councils, the Great Schism, the conversion of the Slavs, the interaction of Greeks and Arabs, the Church under Communism, and today's dispersion. In many ways Ware's argument is similar to the recent Sailing from Byzantium. Ware gives particular attention to the Great Schism and while he notes many failings with the Orthodox at the time, much of the blame inescapably lies with Rome. Rome never could combine papal imperialism and humility.

Theological Exposition

The authority for the Orthodox is Tradition, but it is a tradition different from Rome. Instead of Rome which subordinates (in practice, anyway) Scripture to tradition, and contra to Protestantism subordinating Tradition to Scripture, Orthodoxy notes that Tradition is simply the presence of the Holy Spirit speaking in the life of the Church. Tradition is not simply a nebulous teaching about the Bible that cannot be referenced (as is often the case with Rome), but tradition is comprised of the Councils, icons, teachings of the Fathers, and Scripture (p. 196; not in that order and in varying degrees of importance).

The heart of the Christian faith is the dogma of the Trinity. Much unnecessary ink has been spilt arguing that the West approached the Trinity from "Being and oneness" while the East approached it from "Person and Three-ness." While true in some cases, it is misleading and is more helpful, especially in Ware's exposition (though he himself does not make the argument) to say that with the exception of the Filioque both sides use similar constructions for the doctrine of the Trinity. The main exception, as noted, is the Filioque. The Orthodox argue the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, not from the Father and the Son. The Orthodox argue that Western Filioquism reduces to a quasi-Sabellianism. Ware tries to be sensitive on this issue and notes the difficulties involved.

The most exciting part of Ware's book was the Orthodox view of deification. It is the idea of a personal and organic union between God and the saint (231). It is implied in the doctrine of Christ. Christ became man that we might become god. The goal is that the bodies of the saints will be transformed by divine light and

one day will be bathed with the uncreated light seen on Mt Tabor (233). This is an important point because the Orthodox insist that God saves both body and soul (234).

The most difficult part of Ware's book, obviously, is the doctrine of the Church. The Orthodox advance the claim that they alone constitute the true Church of God on earth. The argument is thus: the church is an image of the Holy Trinity and like the Holy Trinity, it cannot truly be divided (240). Secondly, the church is the body of Christ and can Christ's body be divided (241)? This is difficult for many Protestants looking in. Is Ware suggesting that despite their love for the Lord Jesus, despite their piety, yea even despite their prayers, they are lost? Ware sees the objection coming and affirms that while they aren't part of the true church, they can be saved (though he rightly notes the difficulty in that language). Ware asks, "Does it therefore follow that anyone who is not visibly within the Church is necessarily damned? Of course not; still less does it follow that everyone who is visibly within the Church is necessarily saved" (247). He notes there is one Church, but there are different ways of relating to that one church and many different ways of being separate from it (308).

Orthodox Worship consists of "heaven on earth." There is a strong sense of beauty and wonder. Most noticeably are the icons. Icons are windows to the spiritual world. They are venerated but are not worshipped.

Conclusion:

Ware's book is easy to read, clear, and answers most of the questions an inquirer will have to the Orthodox faith. However, it does raise a few questions (and these are exciting issues in ecclesiology). I ask the following of my Orthodox brethren:

1. If the fathers constitute part of "tradition," and if tradition cannot contradict itself, what happens when the Fathers contradict themselves? The fathers do not give a unanimous witness (Origen, anybody? And that Gregory and Maximus delighted in Origen).
2. Can the claim that the Septuagint corrects the Hebrew original (Ware, 200) really withstand scrutiny? Maybe it can in the providence of God, but this will be a hard pill for many exegetes to swallow. Along those lines, given the acceptance of the Apocrypha, what do we make of errors in the Apocrypha (Judith 1:1-5; Tobit 1; Wisdom of Solomon 11:17)?
3. The claim that "outside the church there is no salvation" needs heavy qualification, as Ware himself acknowledges (247, 308-309). When St Cyprian made that claim the audience to whom he spoke was familiar enough with "one church" (kind providence of the Roman Empire). Unfortunately, that is no longer the case. Most of the people who are professing Christians and live pious lives and really love the Lord Jesus (especially in the modern West) have never even heard of the Orthodox faith, let alone ever seen an Orthodox Church. Therefore, in light of that, to interpret St Cyprian's claim in the same way today as he did in his day, and assuming the conditions are the same, is an historical anachronism.

Similarly, if one maintains the claim that one is the true church, and couple that with Cyprian's claim, yet at the same time one allows for exceptions to the rule, as Ware does (247, 308-309), doesn't that weaken the claim that one is the true church?

My questions aside, this was a very informative and delightful book. The Orthodox Church's heroic witness under Communism is the stuff of legends. Ware does a fine job in discussing the various "distinctions" (I was about to say divisions) within Orthodoxy. The theological section was quite rich. I recommend this book.

Charles says

As I and my family continue our inevitable pivot toward Orthodoxy, I have been reading more works on, you guessed it, Orthodoxy. This book, by the English theologian Timothy Ware, who as a bishop uses the baptismal name Kallistos, is a classic introduction to Orthodoxy. It was first published in 1963 but has more recently been revised, so it is fully up to date on history—and doctrine has not changed in Orthodoxy since 1963, or 963, for that matter. I've actually owned the book for several years, but have only now read it, having been told by several people that it is very much worth reading. And they were right—it is an excellent book.

People in the modern West, even Christians, are largely ignorant of Orthodoxy. The Orthodox, to some extent at least, return the favor—Ware notes that Robert Curzon, a well-traveled English baron, in the 1830s was "disconcerted to find that the Patriarch of Constantinople had never heard of the Archbishop of Canterbury." (He was not the Curzon who was Viceroy of India at the turn of the twentieth century and regarded as England's greatest expert of the time on the Orient, though I imagine they were related somehow.) In the twentieth century and today, with modern communications and emigration, the Orthodox have become somewhat more prominent in the West—especially in America, where large numbers of Orthodox immigrants have established their own churches. Ware's book is an attempt bridge the knowledge gap for Westerners.

The first two-thirds of the book is a detailed and well-written history of Orthodoxy. Ware begins, naturally enough, with a definition of Orthodoxy: "the Christians who are in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople." This excludes Roman Catholics and Protestants, of course, and also the Oriental Orthodox—the Church of the East, today rabidly persecuted by Muslims in places like Syria, and the Monophysite Churches, such as the Coptic Church in Egypt. He also explains the organization of the modern Orthodox Church, which is complicated, but basically boils down to "a family of self-governing Churches," all in communion and which, in theory, decide any disputed questions by convening in councils. There is therefore no equivalent to the Pope, something that is turning out, after all, to be a feature, not a bug.

Ware discusses the seven general councils, the last one in 787, which determined the outlines of mainstream Christian beliefs. Naturally, since the Great Schism, the breach between Orthodoxy and Roman Christianity, is traditionally dated to 1054, these beliefs are shared by all Roman Catholics, and by many Protestants as well. As remembered today, the most critical issues related to the nature of God in Christian doctrine, though many other matters were also decided at these councils. For Orthodoxy, another critical matter was the

treatment of icons, which are more central to worship than are images in the West. Ware identifies iconoclasm with the ever-present Gnostic temptation in Christianity to denigrate the physical world as inferior and to be superseded in ages to come, whereas Orthodox (and all correct Christian) belief is that the material world is “very good” in God’s eyes and is itself ultimately to be “redeemed and glorified.” All this was hammered out within the framework of the (Eastern) Roman empire, of which Ware and other Orthodox tend to have a highly favorable view. The traditional Western view is more negative, conditioned by Roman Catholic hostility and Edward Gibbon’s bigoted, dubious history, and tends, on a political level, to denigrate the Empire as Caesaropapist—that is, with the state dominating the church. Ware, at least, sees it as a symbiotic, cooperative, relationship, and he (along with many Orthodox, I suspect) sees Byzantium at its height as, if still far from an ideal society, the closest Christendom has gotten to one.

Next Ware narrates the complex events leading up to and following the Great Schism, covering everything from the theologian Saint Photius to the Normans in Italy to the Crusades. Interesting information, particularly showing contrasts to the West, frequently crops up, such as the continued prevalence and prominence of lay theologians in the East, where the secular education system had not collapsed as it had in the West. Interspersed in this history is quite a bit of doctrinal discussion, such as details of the Hesychast Controversy, and the related distinctions made in Orthodoxy between God’s essence and energies, a topic that overlaps with the Scholastic innovation of univocity. Later chapters cover, among other matters, the conversion of the Slavs, with a long and fascinating narrative about the Orthodox in Russia, and then detailed coverage of the twentieth century, a time of trials for the Orthodox (and renewed conflict between Orthodox and Roman Catholics in the Balkans, unfortunately). Along the way, Ware also covers the precise current organizational structure of the Church (who knew that Finland was part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople?), and similar administrative matters, both in theory and practice.

The Orthodox, with justification, have a dim view of the Crusades, especially the Fourth, but Ware does tend to elide important details running counter to that narrative, such as that the First Crusade (in 1095) was largely a response to a specific request for aid by the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, after a series of brutal defeats at the hands of the Turks, beginning at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. In his complaints about the Crusaders, some of which are wholly legitimate, Ware even uses as fact the claim by Raymond of Argiles after the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 that “men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins.” You often hear this quote trotted out; I remember Bill Clinton doing so after September 11. Its modern use is to shift the focus from today’s Muslim atrocities to claimed thousand-year-old Christian ones, as if those were equivalent, or rather the latter far more important. Its earlier use, before the age of global Muslim terror, was to attack Roman Catholics and Christianity generally; it appears in atheist Enlightenment tracts. No doubt, as in all medieval wars, lots of people were killed by the Crusaders. But the quote itself is merely a metaphoric citation to Revelation 14:20, describing the end of the world and the slaughter by angels of the opponents of Christ, “And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse’s bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles.” That is, Raymond of Argiles wasn’t puffing himself for the number of people killed, but comparing the battle to the End Times. Oddly, I have never seen this basic fact noted anywhere, though I must have seen the quote itself a hundred times. Ware also relies heavily on biased and outdated sources like Steven Runciman, which undermines what he has to say.

Still, the Orthodox aversion to the Crusades is understandable. But what is less understandable is the relatively gentle touch Ware gives to Muslim conquest of the East and the subsequent destruction of most of Eastern Christianity, which seems like a much larger imposition on the Orthodox than were the Crusades. On the other hand, at least Ware quotes an Englishman visiting Constantinople in 1677, “It doth go hugely against the grain to see the crescent exalted everywhere, the Cross stood so long triumphant.” (With any luck this exaltation can be reversed in the near future; as Europe careens into a ditch, aggressive renewal is as

likely an outcome as permanent decline of the West, which might provide an opportunity such as, for example, Russia returning to the excellent goal of conquering Constantinople.) Ware also notes the truism that although direct violent persecution of Christians was intermittent under Islam (though certainly frequent enough to keep the Christians in their place, and Christians were always required to be subordinate or face death), what ultimately caused most conversion to Islam was simply the financial and social benefits accruing to Muslims—martyrdom inspires, social debility does not. Moreover, it is not really the Ottomans' fault that their system of treating religious leaders of Christians as being simultaneously ethnic leaders has led to a long history of unfortunate intertwining of the two roles among the Orthodox, as well as corruption and ethnic chauvinism among the different Orthodox churches that were under Ottoman rule (i.e., all of them, except the Russians). But the Armenian genocide rates not a word, probably because the Turks, on whose land (for now) the Ecumenical Patriarch must live, don't want to hear about their recent slaughter of Christians. On the whole, therefore, Ware lets the Muslims off far too easy, something that seems very common among the Orthodox.

In several places, Ware points out the tendency of the Orthodox toward slowness of action, of any type. This is partially organizational, the nature of conciliar decision making, and partially simply a trait that in this age of liquid modernity has so far been immeasurably beneficial (though I doubt if the Orthodox will be wholly immune to this corrosion in the wars to come—and, in fact, Ware himself was seen to be hedging his bets on homosexual “marriage” earlier this year). The downside of this is that those not fond of action are also those less likely to accomplish things, which is, perhaps, why it is the Roman Catholics of the West who made the modern world, followed by the Protestants. The introspective nature of Orthodox practice and theology, focused on unchanging ritual, does not lend itself to crusade or, perhaps, to the drive that pushes humanity forward. That begs the question, of course, whether pushing humanity forward is a good thing, or, instead, the monks of Mount Athos have the right of it. But for someone like me, who likes rockets to Mars, and beyond, the spirit of the Jesuits (the seventeenth-century ones, not today's ones), or of Cortes, who “conquered Mexico for God, gold, and glory, and only a mundane imagination would distinguish these impulses, for they were one and the same,” is beneficial to humanity, and that is not really found among the Orthodox. Maybe there is a synthesis to be had, but I suspect that what makes the Orthodox who they are would not survive an attempt to make them more active and outward-looking.

The latter third of the book is doctrine, which, like the first part, is excellent. Here various Orthodox practices that contrast with their Western analogues are noticeable, especially the emphasis on mysticism over strict rationality, and that the Orthodox are more comfortable with some degree of ambiguity, with not delineating every matter of doctrine specifically. Most differences between Orthodox and Roman Catholics are really matters of emphasis, such as Christ as victim versus Christ as victor, but Ware does an excellent job explaining the importance of certain differences that seem, at first glance, utterly obscure and unimportant, but are really not, such as the “Filioque,” the question (in the Nicene Creed) whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (the Orthodox position) or the Father and the Son (the Roman position, a medieval innovation). Among other subtleties, Ware notes that the Orthodox belief is that the Roman position depreciates the personal characteristics of each individual member of the Trinity (an effect similar to, though arising differently from, the abominable use of “gender-neutral” language for God). Around that explanation Ware also offers a fantastic discussion of the Trinity itself. He further discusses the importance of prayer and ritual, the rejection of Quietism, the specifics of ritual, and much more. And he notes the crucial Orthodox emphasis on theosis, the goal of divinization, of ultimate unity with God's energies (though not His essence). He ends with a plea for reunion of Christians, something devoutly to be wished, but which looks even less likely nowadays, given the corruption of most Western Christians—though maybe the focus should not be on the West, but on the rest of the world, and what can be done there. We will see soon enough, but either way, my bet is that Orthodoxy will have a much more prominent role in the immediate future of the world than it has played in the past thousand years.

Laura says

This was a re-read for an assignment. It was helpful 10 years ago, when I was unfamiliar with a lot of the history and theology; and it was interesting to read again now that these are all very familiar to me. Met. Ware has an easy style and covers a lot of materials simply and clearly.

The book is divided into two sections, history and theology. The theology section is only about 130 pages, but beautifully presents a concise, Christian theology that is ancient and beautiful, fairly contrasted with western Christianity as necessary. This is what I wish my friends and family would read in order to understand my conversion. For Protestants who may not be interested in Orthodoxy but are tired of the baggage of American Christianity, this offers a fresh glimpse at early Christian faith and practice, a faith full of the joy of the resurrection and love of God.

Kathryn Haydon says

This book left me wanting more--in a good way! The history of the Orthodox Church was fascinating and detailed, the faith and worship section understandably limited to conveying Orthodox theology and practice, and not defending or explaining it in minute terms. For the record, I was raised in a non-denominational Protestant church in Texas and one year ago married an Anglican deacon (soon-to-be priest) who identifies with Orthodoxy perhaps as closely as with Anglicanism. I read this book to broaden my understanding of The Orthodox Church and it provided a perfect introduction. I look forward to further reading!

Ruth says

This was a fascinating read about the history and beliefs of the eastern orthodox church. Until recently, I have been sadly in the dark with regards to church history. It was so interesting to learn how the early Christian church was formed, how its doctrine was set down through many councils, and how the Roman Catholic Church eventually split off due to differences over the role of the pope and the origin of the Holy Spirit, in addition to cultural differences and politics. After the schism, the book follows the spread of orthodox Christianity into Eastern Europe and Russia, and then tells of the difficulties the church faced under Muslim and communist rule (and in some cases, from the Roman Catholics). It really is amazing to me that the church has survived as it has, through so much persecution.

The second half of the book deals with the theology of the Orthodox church. It outlines the differences between Roman Catholic and Orthodox beliefs, and contrasts them with the Protestant church as well. Generally, the Orthodox church is much more mystical than western churches, in that it gives much more weight to the mysteries of God. There is much more spirituality and much less western logic. Another noted contrast is the way the Orthodox view the crucifixion and resurrection; while the western church focuses on the price paid for our sins - a more legalistic focus that goes along with Roman law - the eastern church focuses more on the victory - Jesus triumphed over death, and made it possible for us to be in communion with God once more.

In the eastern church, the goal of every Christian is to continually advance on their path towards deeper

communion with God - to become more and more like him, to return to the image of God in which we were made. This is done through prayer, fasting, and, yes, good works. Salvation in the Orthodox church is not based on a one-time decision, it is a process that you work out throughout your lifetime.

The church also relies, like the Roman Catholic church, on holy tradition - this includes the Bible, but also other teachings that were handed down by the apostles to the church. They believe that the church is responsible to determine how to appropriately interpret scripture, and that the multitude of denominations within the Protestant church is a testimony to the problems that can arise when individuals seek to interpret the scriptures on their own, apart from the historical context of the church and its early founders. Only a council of bishops, acting together, can determine appropriate interpretation and theology, and their decisions are believed to be inspired by God.

This book is highly recommended for anyone that is interested in learning about church history or early Christian/Orthodox beliefs.

Josh Hopping says

Originally published in 1963, “The Orthodox Church” was Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware’s first book, written before he entered the priesthood and based upon his personal study of the Eastern Orthodox Church. In fact, at the time that the book was published, Bishop Ware had only been a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church for five years – having joined the church in 1958 after being raised in the Anglican Church (he’s from Somerset, England).

The book itself is separated into two broad selections. The first part deals with the history of the Eastern Orthodox Church, from the first century up until the 1980s (the copy I read was updated and expanded in 1993). This was a fun selection for me as I LOVE history and had always wondered how the Eastern Orthodox Church developed over the years. Most (read “majority”) church history books in English tend to follow the development of Christianity into Europe via the Roman Catholic Church before taking the Luther/Calvin road into Protestantism. Accordingly “The Orthodox Church” serves as a much needed counterweight to the Protestant centric history of the church.

The second major selection of the book deals with the faith and worship of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Bishop Ware covers such topics as Holy Tradition, the Sacraments, feasts, fast and prayer. Like the first half of the book, this selection was eye-opening in that it covered items and/or described the theology of the church in a way that I had not heard before. However, I would have to say that Bishop Ware’s other book, “The Orthodox Way”, does a better job at conveying the theological concepts of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Mostly, I would have to say, because in the “The Orthodox Way”, the practical expression of Eastern Orthodox theology was left open to the reader - allowing them to chew on the concepts and adopt them as led by the Holy Spirit. In this book, “The Orthodox Church”, the goal was to expose the reader to how the Eastern Orthodox Church works and lives – meaning that Bishop Ware spends more time on talking about how they express and embody the theological views that they hold dear. And, in this manner, Bishop Ware did great – he definitely opened my eyes as to why they do what they do. However, I have to admit that I am not a Eastern Orthodoxy member and, therefore, I did not...umm...agree whole heartily on their practices...

Yet that was to be expected and, on the scale of things, is something very, very minor as there is a TON we can learn from Eastern Orthodoxy about the nature of God, humanity and being the Body of Christ. This is

definitely a good book to read if you are wanting to branch out of Protestantism and learn about the movement of Jesus within different members of the greater Body of Christ.

Blessings.

Brian says

Worshipping God nearly every Sunday in a Russian Orthodox church during my year in Kazakhstan introduced me to the deeply complex, yet simply beautiful worship of God that is found in Orthodox Christianity. For those several months, it was enough to be ministered to by the beauty of the liturgy, to grow in understanding of its meaning, and to gain basic understanding of Orthodox history and teaching. For several years thereafter, I've longed to deepen my understanding of these last two topics, and I looked to Bishop Kallistos Ware's book to aid that process.

Naturally, the book presents the history and the theology of the Orthodox Church from an Orthodox position. There are indeed times in the historical section in which Ware comes across as defensive, even over non-doctrinal matters. On the other hand, he is very objective in the ecumenical sections, presenting the various viewpoints on the current dialogue with other Christian movements (which is, by the way, quite active, and of which he is somewhat the head), while still masking his own views. Altogether, the book is an enlightening read about an oft-misunderstood tradition to which all of Christianity owes much (ever heard of the trinity?). The book was not able to answer all my questions about this 2000-year old church, but it is hard not to walk away from it in deeper awe of a church that has survived centuries of persecution, developed some of Christianity's most complicated theological claims, undergone NO REFORMATION, converted whole countries, developed the richest liturgical worship that at least I've ever witnessed, and some of whose members have led such exemplary lives of Christian suffering and virtue that words become useless in seeking to describe them. I highly recommend this book to any Christian seeking to understand the history of his/her own faith.

Eric says

I've only read the first part so far (waiting for someone to catch up with me). It's separated into two parts - History and Worship.

The history section deals with the very beginnings of the church up to the post-communism period, which was an update in this newest addition. This history seems to be very thorough and appropriately biased. My impression was one of sadness, actually. I wasn't prepared to read such a dismal history from an Orthodox person himself. It seems like the church was cut off and oppressed from every side. Perhaps he is exaggerating this, but I can't tell why. It was discouraging to me as someone interested in the church. I imagine the second half of the book, Worship, redeems the church in showing what exactly it has suffered to preserve for the rest of the world.

Manny says

Excellent book on the Eastern Orthodox Church. I pray one day we will all be united under one church as

Christ wished in John, Chapter 17.

Stuart says

If someone asked me, "What is the one book you would recommend to someone wanting to understand Eastern Orthodoxy?" I would answer without thinking The Orthodox Church by Kalistos (Timothy) Ware. I remember reading this book nearly a decade ago, shortly after my conversion to Catholicism. I often wonder if I had read this book before my conversion, if I would have went down a different path and ended up Eastern Orthodox. That's a story for a different day, This book was originally published in the 1960s, and it is still the best introduction to the Orthodox Church. When I saw that it was being re-published by Penguin Books, I knew I wanted to re-read it to see what changed and how I felt reading it ten years later.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the history of the Orthodox Church and addresses topics like the Ecumenical Councils, the Great Schism, dealing with Islam, and the Twentieth Century. The second part touches on Tradition, God and Humankind, Sacraments, and the Church Calendar. I especially enjoyed reading about the Schism, because if we are going to heal this Schism we need to understand it from both sides. Kalistos Ware presents, in my opinion, the most unbiased view of the Great Schism. Bear with me for a long quote:

"Rome and Orthodoxy since the schism have each claimed to be the true Church. Yet each, while believing in the rightness of its own cause, must look back at the past with sorrow and repentance. [. . .] And each side, while claiming to be the one true Church, must admit that on the human level it has been grievously impoverished by the separation. The Greek east and the Latin west needed and still need one another. For both parties the great schism has proved a great tragedy."

In Chapter 16: The Orthodox Church and the Reunion of Christians is a chapter that I felt was sorely lacking in updated material. The part which touched on Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism failed to address the great strides in communication and dialogue, which the past three popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis) have made with the Orthodox Patriarchs. The lack of updates in this chapter are a small reflection of the book as a whole. I feel like there should have been a chapter on the 21st Century as well. The lack of updates aside, this book is still edifying even 50 years after its original publication. The book somehow manages to be broad and deep at the same time, and I was pleased to have found the "Further Reading" section more familiar this time through. There are still many books in it that I want to read, but I am making progress! In conclusion, this is an excellent introduction to Orthodoxy and one you should have in your library. However, if you own the edition from the 1990s, you don't really need this version, unless yours has been read and re-read so many times, it's in tatters.
